The Carnage of Urmafrae

By Ostara Gale
Edited by Theta Mandel & Aristide Twain

PUBLISHED BY THE CHESHIRE HOUSE

Copyright © Ostara Gale 2024

All rights reserved.

This story is a work of fiction. Any similarity to other narratives or stories is done entirely within the bounds of parody and/or satire. Beyond the targets thereof, any resemblance to persons living or dead, or events past or present, is co-incidental.

The right of Ostara Gale to be identified as the author of this work is asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Lilith © Jayce Black

The Ishiok Galaxy & associated concepts © The Cheshire House

Lotto, Mae © Elodie Christian

Archons of Time, Cahlough, Hyades-Space, the Tourbillon, "xertonoid" © Ryan Fogarty

Lilitu, Viv-Gabriel Arch'ikarios, the Turning © Ostara Gale

The Superiors © Hunter O'Connell

Archons, the Celestial Academies, the Great Cosmic War, the Greater Time Elementals, H-Space, the Hyperspace Tyrants, the Lesser Time Elementals, the Morning Star © Aristide Twain

Lotto was enjoying her time just relaxing in her flat on the planet Ashio Trias — her home base in the Ishiok Galaxy. Ever since settling down here in her previous life, Lotto had grown accustomed to its idiosyncrasies.

Her recent change of form into a lupine xertonoid[1] had only served to further endear her to her new home.

Certainly, she had frequented the Ishiok for a long time, in lives past — why, her Homeworld had been based there, back before it ceased ever to have existed. But the turmoil of Cosmic Warfare had not allowed her the luxury of a true, defined base of operations; to the extent that she'd considered anywhere to be 'home' in those days, it had to be Earth. California, to be specific.

But since meeting Mae, the amazing and wonderful Mae, Lotto had felt like they wanted to settle down. It'd seemed ironic, considering Mae had allowed the Detective to see so much more of the universe, but she supposed it was precisely this which had made her settle. When the whole of Creation was practically accessible from your backyard, you got more joy out of the mundane; the *hunger* to explore became less all-consuming. It was a hobby, that was all. Not one she was going to give up any time soon, not in its entirety, but she also wanted to *rest*, after all that fighting and killing and running and hiding.

But still she enjoyed chasing the mysteries of the universe, saving the innocent, and picking up breadcrumbs about her past. Recently she'd encountered some clues which implied she *hadn't* originally been from Old Earth, and that *that* had been the temporal rewrite, enacted by an agent of her Superiors. She was… uncertain of this, but it did leave some things to wonder about. She had endeavoured to investigate further but had been reluctant to

---

[1] Many words have been used to describe those creatures whose physiological body-plan possesses a noticeable similarity to the basic anatomy of such species as the unaltered Ishioka or the Humans of Old Earth, thought to have originated with Lotto's people, the Archons. Although every one of these species would prefer to be the archetype to which others are compared, most galactic resources have defaulted to "Xertonoid" as the neutral term of choice in formal or academic contexts, for sociopolitical reasons which this margin is too narrow to contain.

set foot on Old Earth in her current body; humans of that era didn't exactly react favourably to xertonoid jackals, after all.

Suddenly, Lotto had a very particular and very odd feeling that something was *wrong* about the view out of the window. There were the mountains, the forests… She could've *sworn* that before there had been a small village — nothing much, mind, she wouldn't have picked her relaxation spot in any *busy* place, but some nearby sapient life was comforting — but there was *nothing* there at all. Not a house in sight. Just a long, continuous field with a river at the far end, and a wood on the other side.

She dismissed the thing as a mere mistake on her part, what 21st century inhabitants of Earth might have called a "Mandela effect", and went back to resting with a book on top of her head.

No, she couldn't ignore this. Her pointy ears perked up as she jumped up out of the armchair, slightly startling Mae — her rabbit, companion, and mode of transport.

"Right, Mae," Lotto began, easily slipping back into the role of Detective. (Though Lotto couldn't understand the shape-shifting rabbit unless she was in xertonoid form, the same could not be said for the reverse.)

"I want to understand what has happened to that village, there were a lot of people there I really liked, probably. Maybe."

Seeing Mae attempt to roll her eyes, Lotto interjected her own speech.

"Not the point! They deserve to exist. We need to figure out who erased them, and…"

She didn't finish that last sentence, having realised she had really no idea how the pair would even go about undoing a timeline-alteration.

They'd figure it out, Lotto reassured herself and Mae. After all, Lotto herself had undergone training at Cahlough, that most pretentious of Celestial Academies. As for Mae, well, she was, in her own peculiar way, one of the greater elementals.

* * *

Far away, in the heartworld of the unforgiving Ishiok Imperium, General Krianne made her way up the grand staircase of the Angel of the Apocalypse, trembling in fear. They said the Angel could turn a person inside out just by focusing.

She rested one of her eight legs on the stone in front of the Angel, as custom required.

"Oh great Messiah, Angel from the Apocalypse of Ouaiti, Teacher to Osiris, I deliver thee harrowing news"

The Angel — a mess of black, red, white, and *empty* feathers, all jumbled up to sum to an appearance *almost* reminiscent of xertonoids, yet at the same time miles off — opened one of its eighteen eyes, and stared at the General, inspecting her.

A voice that reminded Krianne of nothing less than a thousand screaming babies — which she *had* heard, in the fields of battle against a tendril of Ouaiti — requested, quite simply, for her to *continue*.

Stumbling slightly over her words, unprepared for the experience of talking to the Apocalypse itself, Krianne continued. "We felled the Urmafrae, just as you foresaw to be necessary."

They paused for a second, but then saw that the Angel wished them to continue, and so complied.

"After re-doing the Battle of the Euryale Cascade thirteen times, we realised such a strategy would not work, and so whilst the majority of my troops stayed in the Euryale Cascade as a distraction to the Urmafrae, myself and a small platoon travelled down the enemy's timeline, arriving at what we could reasonably discern to be their point of genesis. There, we slaughtered the entire primitive tribe, reducing them to the dust and nothingness whence they came."

Krianne's tale of terror and extermination was neither proud nor shameful; she spoke it breathlessly, but the facts themselves seemed scarcely to matter. What mattered was to tell the Angel the facts, whatever the facts might be.

"Upon resurfacing in the present, we discovered the entire squadron of my troops had vanished — as was to be expected; they had never been sent on this mission, after all. We stayed out in the great Turning of time for a while longer, ensuring our timestreams were properly protected from the changes we had made — that we wouldn't accidentally cause a grandfather paradox to propagate throughout the Imperium — and then, at last, we made it back here, to Ishtar. My platoon is outside, waiting to be dismissed."

The Angel continued staring deep into Krianne's eyes until they felt it must be getting ready to up-end her timeline.

The Angel turned back away from Krianne. Upon its back sat a mesmeric orange crystal.

A thought invaded Krianne's mind, telling her to touch it. Unable to disobey the will of her empyrean master, Krianne did so, and the gem, like a thing alive, crawled up her arm, burrowing its way into her skin.

She felt as if she should be shocked, but… wasn't. Her whole body and mind just felt… content. It seemed as though all her desires had been fulfilled. *All her desires.*

Krianne was drawn back to childhood, where her mother had scolded her for the smallest of errors. But she hadn't, she'd been so, so kind. Her mother had supported her wish to join the armies of the Ishiok, despite the fact no one else in the family had ever wished so, and that most of the rest of the family were at least slightly anti-Imperium.

Krianne had ascended the ranks with ease, becoming a Sub-General by the age of only thirty-two. This had been her choice, and she was so, so happy with it. So content.

By age forty, she'd become General of Agiel's Squadron, and it was on her fifty-first birthday she barrelled down the Urmafrae's timeline, massacring them all to become the War Lord of Raphel.

War Lord Krianne, with her two pairs of wings and five legs, left the Palace of the Angel followed by their platoon of mindless drones.

* * *

After pondering for a few hours over what to do, how to figure out where the village had gone — or as she'd decided was most likely, *who had erased it from the continuum* — Lotto decided to let Mae take her around the locale, planning to let the winds of the Tourbillon[2] carry them around the fissure in the timeline. Mae stepped around a corner, and the pair were travelling through the Tourbillon, and then the pair were not.

Around where the village wasn't, Mae could sense reverberations spreading throughout the structure of history; a structure which no longer had clear Lords. Her curiosity piqued, Mae dug her paws into the temporal ouroboros beneath[3] the village, and dragged it up to the surface.

There wasn't a village — there had never been, so why would there be? — but there was also a distinct *feeling* of village-ness around, as if history was still catching up to a recent alteration, and was still expressing a bygone culture; the village was a ghost, of the temporal variety.

Staring ahead, up at the small mound she vaguely remembered the Village Hall being located on — although now it felt more like some strange,

---

[2] 'Tourbillon' is the preferred Archon word for the mathematical transportation vortex better known to us, and Mae, as the Turning or the *Swelgendryne*. The Archons, with characteristic pomposity, insist that 'Tourbillon' sounds more important than the former and more technical than the latter. In truth, no one else cares enough to disagree.

[3] 'Beneath' is here used in the temporal-mechanics sense of the word. Every location in the Archons' webbed universe has a network of connections to its own past and future, and in temporally-disturbed situations these can loop around, creating an ouroboros-like effect as the snake of causality bites its own tail. That is, some parts of the structure of history around the event will be seen to 'devour', or at any rate connect to, other parts which appear to be the relative cause. At the topmost layer of reality with which most lower-dimensional beings are familiar, this looks more like a magic trick, a kind of real-space word-play, than like a dangerous anomaly to the structure of space-time itself; the disturbances are most apparent in the transtemporal dimension, that which has been termed the Turning, the Swelgendryne, or — if we must — the Tourbillon. Whatever one dubs the construct, it can be described as being 'beneath' the material layer of reality insofar as it constitutes its underpinnings, its foundations — the chafing metal structure beneath the handsome rubber faux-flesh of the fun-fair animatronic.

inverted sense of *déjà vu* — Lotto heard the unmistakable sound of a small child running; screaming with delight.

"What was that?" voiced Lotto, before remembering Mae couldn't answer, currently being a rabbit. It was a frequent error on the part of strangers to underestimate Mae, and assume a rabbit was all she was; at times Lotto made the opposite error.

Right on cue, the small rabbit transmogrified into a young, jolly-looking man, and answered.

"That was… weird," Mae remarked, uncertain what else he could say.

"Mhm," murmured Lotto, beginning to walk towards the small mound, cogs turning within her mind. It had quite passed the absent-minded Detective by that her companion had transmogrified into a perfect duplicate of Lotto's own previous body.

Without warning, the Clocktower struck the hour, chiming seventeen times over the course of several minutes; many of the buildings of the village waxed into existence, before waning out again by the final chime.

By this point, Lotto was terribly confused, and began to frantically search around, analysing bits of dust in a vain attempt to notice what was wrong. She even took off her warm purple hat to fidget with, she was worrying so much.

Mae came over to her and crouched down, putting his hand on hers. He was about to speak when suddenly space began to bend weirdly, just for a second, before… Lotto was no longer there.

* * *

The War Lord of Raphel made their way across the stars in the *Immacula*, a vessel constructed for the Imperium's interstellar conquest.

By the end of the day, she would have made it to the Outer Spiral of Iop'ka — one of the sixteen named extremities of the Ishiok Galaxy — and, if all went to plan, even set out on the Nineteenth Extra-Galactic Crusade. There

she would journey into what her culture called the Black Void — the seemingly-endless gap between the spiralled cluster of stars they called home and any other such constellations, if any existed. No expedition had ever made it back, so there were many in the Ishiok who refused to believe in the existence of these so-called "other galaxies". With every year that passed without the breaching of the Void, the sceptics grew in number.

For those remaining believers, the Angel of the Apocalypse represented an almost messianic hope; for Io, the great Scrolls of the Apocalypse spoke of many stars and galaxies. Therein were recorded the names and qualities of the Stellarian Spiral Galaxy, *the* Galaxy from which all others took their name; and once, the Scrolls proclaimed, it had held the original heart of the Ouaiti, before the people of the Cosmos decided they were no longer majestic and felled their clockworks from Creation. The tides of time washed over, and the Ouaiti had never been.

Krianne didn't much care for these things of the meta-past, but even her curiosity *was* piqued by the lingering effects of the Ouaiti's imposed metastructure. Heavens, they had shaped the people of the Cosmos themselves! So many people of the Universe were xertonoid… There were of course her own people, the Ishioka, but also the Humans of Old Earth, and some of their descendent-species — there were the Ferynis — too many to count. And, according to ancient accounts, that shape — two arms, two legs, one head — that shape had been favoured by the Ouaiti themselves in their physical manifestations.

Of course, since the arrival of the Angel, the Ishioka had attempted to transcend their limiting xertonoid forms, becoming feline and bat-like and arachnid. Their Angel was their inspiration, the living image of the perfection which they hoped to reach as the conclusion of this endeavour — some would call them cthulhine, but the comparison missed the point.

As the name of this campaign implied, Krianne was indeed leading the *19*th attempt at exodus, and she was filled with the same certainty her predecessors had been — that she would be the first to successfully leave the Ishiok, and expand her Angel's Blessed Imperium into the Beyond.

* * *

Mae looked all around, suddenly seeing more and more echoes of children dancing, and merchants walking, and pipers piping. Suddenly, he felt himself trapped within the wall of a building, beginning to suffocate. The particles of the wall were within his skin, clogging up his blood flow and his lungs. Just for that moment, one would not be able to tell where Mae's body ended and the wall began. His heart was stuffed with concrete; he didn't even feel the iridescent glow *begin*.

Luckily the wall's reality diminished in time. In a fit of unease, Mae once more became a bunny, and continued to hop through the not-village.

* * *

Lotto fell back, saving herself from falling into the opposite wall by pushing her hands out. The opposite *wall*. She was inside a house, inside the village. Which didn't exist. She would have called this peculiar, if not for the time her Superiors had got her to wrap a rogue Morning Star around the tip of a needle, as a choir of angels danced on it. Playing with reality like that tended to warp one's perception of peculiarity.

Everything around her looked covered in a subtle shimmer-effect, and the sound of chatter off in the distance was muffled; it was like she was underwater.

Lotto sat up and made her way across the room she was in, which, by means of her amazing detective skills, she inferred was a bakery, owing to all the baking equipment, bread, and bakers which occupied it. As she came near the door, she saw that there was a man sitting there behind the counter, happily going through and organising his bread, labelling each loaf with a name and description; he didn't notice Lotto as she walked by.

Once outside, Lotto looked over the vast expanse of the town — because yes, it was more of a town than a village, if she was honest — and saw the children shrieking whilst playing their games of catch and skip. And he also saw all the adults around, carrying loads of material to and from buildings, engaged in their day-to-day work. So many people, where before there had been none. So many lives, so many complex interweaving experiences….

No one seemed to notice Lotto as she made her way throughout the town — one man even walked directly *through* her, making her feel queasy, although no actual sensation passed through her. The experience was deeply unsettling, and made Lotto terrified that the village had somehow been swapped for her — was she no longer real? What would happen to Mae, if she'd never existed? These thoughts, and ones like them, raced through Lotto's mind repeatedly, driving her to remember the Onslaught of the Urizen[4]. She awoke a little while later, her anxieties subdued. The Onslaught had taught her that no one was truly unreal; that anyone could claw themself to substance. This had been a terrifying prospect *then*, but Lotto was nothing if not good at translating learned experience from trauma to tools for optimism in the future.

Lotto came to sit down on a fountain at the town's centre. A small child came up to her, their eyes looking like they were staring off into the abyss, and his form slightly more solid and less shimmery than the rest of the town's. And then he spoke. Directly to Lotto.

"We're dead, aren't we?"

"What?" Lotto answered, in shock.

"We. The village, the town, all of us. We're dead — never lived, even. Our children's children will never've been born."

"I… I don't know. How — where did you hear this?"

"I felt the claw of the Lady turn back time, and I was not. And then…I'm confused. Why do we exist?"

---

[4] *Onslaught of the Urizen* (IPA: ɒnslɔːt ɒf ðə əˈrɪzn) – *Cosmic War: Event (Minor)*. Also *of the Arisen* or *of the Arizen*, depending on manuscripts. It should come as no surprise that the Great Cosmic War was the kind of conflict during which "Let's resurrect God" begins to feel not just like a measured response to unfolding events, but like a pressing necessity. Unfortunately, many different parties took notice of that promising avenue towards a paradigm shift in celestial hostilities. The Onslaught, then, was the bloody culmination of the tensions which had — as it were — *arisen* between the Lord Founder's various independently-resurrected selves. The event reduced the count from the absurd to the mere ridiculous, and also resulted in many of the Undead Urizens — many of whom genuinely claimed the lurid epithet of "Urizen the Undead" — being transferred between various levels of reality, including one lesser copy of the Fortress of History breaking out of its oxbow reality.

The child's eyes glistened, and Lotto saw a scar in their chronogenetics, splicing up their existence.

* * *

As the Nineteenth Extra-Galactic Crusade made its way into the Black Void, its War Lord had a lingering feeling she had not utterly completed the dissolution of Urmafrae.

Occasionally in the dead of night, she'd wake up in a cold sweat, back home on Euoshio II, with a hazy memory of her time as War Lord of the Crusade. She'd check her coms-pad, and see that the Urmafrae still existed. For a moment — just a moment — she'd be confused as to how or why they did, before being confused about why she would think they *didn't*. And then she'd get up, and go about her normal day, preparing for battle against the Shaja'ra. But when she fell asleep…

She'd awaken. Back in the *Navitrix*, leading craft of the Crusade. And she'd cast away that peculiar dream, until it hit her again.

She started to wonder if she was a War Lord dreaming she was at home, or at home dreaming she was a War Lord. In both states she was *certain* of her reality, but as the days and months went by, her steadfast certainty was whittled away.

* * *

Slowly but surely, Mae began to hatch a plan.

She'd leave Ashio Trias — which might mean abandoning Lotto in the process, but if she didn't go through with this then she'd quite possibly never get her back — and re-enter the Tourbillon. Then she'd follow the Time Winds *upstream*, flying blind, fighting against the resolving timelines, all in the desperate hope that she might make it back to the source of all this carnage.

She schemed, she considered, and at last made up her mind. But when she tried to leave the material plane, the usual ebb of time had been replaced with a deadly storm, pushing her out of the Tourbillon and back into normal

space. Again, she tried, and again was hurled out by the mysterious energies of space-time.

And so she tried again, and again, but the collapsing onslaught was too much for her to handle.

Mae speculated that if this kept up, the Time Winds would flow out of the Tourbillon and into normal space, wiping from History the entirety of Ashio Trias — possibly the whole Ashio System, including the planet Ishtar. It would be gone, so thoroughly that even the Archons of Time could find no trace of it.

…Which wasn't saying much, Mae realised, considering the Archons themselves had stopped having ever existed quite a while back. Old reflexes.

Ashio Trias would be forgotten even by the Crystal Council —

— who had died out as well. Bother.

Well, it would be beyond the reach of *anyone* who cared to safeguard the Universe; beyond the recall of anyone who chronicled its winding, fitful history. There had to be such people yet; a few of the great Libraries had surely survived. She'd visited one herself, not long ago; it was where she'd met Gabriel. Yes, it could truthfully be said that *those* people would fail to recall the village if the catastrophe was not prevented.

But she chided herself for the mental tangent. Whoever would do the forgetting, Mae was determined to ensure it would not come to that.

This time she didn't try to fight the currents of time, but rather let herself be knocked to and fro, using all of her strength to not pass back into the material plane.

Eventually, she managed to concentrate enough on the nature of the Tourbillon itself that she changed her perspective — no longer did she see it as a great, whirling ocean in four dimensions, wild and unpredictable, its omnidirectional waves tossing and turning under the force of terrible Winds. Now she beheld a great clock face, a mechanism that was simpler and yet more unyielding than the complexity of its underpinnings made it appear. A

clock face, yes, and she was holding onto a hand; she was *letting* it drag her around. That was all those Winds were.

This time, as it moved, she jumped across from it to the *next* hand, narrowly avoiding a treacherous fall into the interstices of time. Then, the rabbit bounced along the hand's length to jump again. Before long, repeating this process a few times had gotten Mae a safe distance away from the wild epicentre of the localised whirlpool.

Finally, she relaxed, and the let clock melt away, revealing once more the interpretation of the Tourbillon that was familiar to her — the Great Ocean of Time, whose wavefronts were hers to ride out.

Mae basked for a moment in the relative peace of that sight, then remembered she needed to be chasing the origin of the time storm. At once, she adopted the form of a dolphin. Here on an enfolded higher-dimensional plane, this was less like morphing and more like making use of a limb she'd had all along — not that a mortal could have told the difference. In this form she swam across the chronostars, passing ships and islands and distant, localised storms.

After what felt like both mere hours, and a lifetime, Mae found herself being pushed away much more powerfully than ever before, as if there was a quasar within the Great Ocean itself.

Mae dove down towards the time-quasar, pushing with all of her might against the current, watching out of the corners of her eye as the many possible timelines which been surrounding her disappeared. Her birth on Lotto's home planet went first, then her birth on Ashio Trias, her birth on Old Earth — all gone. When she finally made it through, she passed the event horizon of a white hole and climbed through the labyrinthine clockworks of the Tourbillon. She sat, panting, in the corridors of the ship.

Mae looked back.

All she could be certain of was that Lotto had found her, several lifetimes ago. But she didn't know when or why, and the more she thought about it,

the less she could remember the time she'd spent with the Archon when the latter had been a hound, or a xertonoid lioness. The realisation troubled her.

So intently troubled was Mae, in fact, that she entirely forgot to mask her appearance.

* * *

Krianne awoke yet again, this time in her cabin on the *Navitrix*. She felt exhausted, but also filled with the awareness that this was the day that her Crusade would finally leave the Ishiok and enter the lesser Void, which brought a strange energy to her bones as she made her way out of her room and down the corridor.

She stopped, noticing *something* out of the corner of her eye. But everything about it seemed *wrong*. Ears in the wrong place, slightly too large a head, but that was just the start. Somehow, the being looked *different* from the reality which surrounded it. A comparison forced itself into Krianne's mind, ignoring the ridicule with which every higher function of the War Lord's mind attempted to squash it: the rabbit looked like it was *animated* in a subtly different *style* to the rest of the universe — as if its world and Krianne's had both been rendered into cartoons with subtly incompatible design aesthetics. Stupid thought.

She approached the rabbit, who seemed somehow lost in thought, and knelt down.

Lotto looked forward in utter shock, not understanding why the child could feel the changing tides of time, nor how they could even talk to one another.

But before they could think over this more, the scene before Lotto shifted and suddenly he could see a squadron of soldiers descending upon the village. Each had a sigil engraved onto their armour, a sigil which looked like a clock face with seven hands, curved and interlocked.

The soldiers walked calmly through the village, somehow appearing even more solid than Lotto did to herself. And each of them held up their guns, and blasted down the townsfolk. There was no blood or fire; these were high-tech weapons. That just made the sight more haunting. People simply vanished, deconstructed down to their most basic level — erased. None could hide, nor hide fast enough; at last, none were left.

Then the soldiers turned their weapons on the buildings, the furniture, even the roads. The village was razed to the ground, more literally than any barbarian horde of Old Earth legend had ever managed. Not a speck of dust remained; not a dying ember.

All the while Lotto shouted out at them, but they wouldn't listen. Couldn't listen, she supposed — but she was a little beyond intellectual questions. She kept shouting. Shouting them for them to stop — shouting questions, entreaties. Why? Why were they doing this?

Why…

Why —

In the mind of the detective, an actual question raised itself as the soldiers began to file out of the empty clearing.

Why had they killed every person before even beginning to raze the village?

But it was not that illogical, belaboured cruelty which truly horrified her. It was the look in the phantom warriors' eyes. Not sadism, not undirected wickedness, not even the machine-like conviction of the well-indoctrinated soldier. *True hatred.* Every soldier here thought each and every child was personally responsible for every misfortune they'd ever faced.

And they acted like it.

* * *

Kianne reached down to pet the rabbit, and it ran away down the corridor. Grumbling, she ran after it, curious and somewhat fearful of this lifeform which had just *appeared* here, on the edge of the known universe.

* * *

Mae raced away from the big scary lady — which was all she thought of Kianne — attempting to find her way to the control room of the ship, where she presumed she could find the source of this strange quandary. But all she found there were computers, which by her standards were blackboards. They couldn't have been the cause, at least not by themselves.

The big scary woman caught up with Mae — and for the first time Mae took a good, strong look at her. A *proper* look, inspecting her not just on the photonic level, but the subtemporal as well. And there she saw it, the source of this great retro-carnage.

A fierce fire, a maelstrom trapped within the tourbillon of a watch-face.

All encased within the soul of this one xertonoid, this Ishioka.

The rabbit looked deeper into her eyes, stared past the blinding ferocity, and saw its making. The War Lord — for that was who this woman was, Mae realised — had undone an entire culture, reduced its existence from an interstellar conglomerate to… nothing. The very beginning of… Mae couldn't find the name of this people, no matter how hard she tried. The very beginning of this destroyed culture had been a lone village, or perhaps a town, and her and her squadron had entered it, and exterminated the populace.

Lone village.

That's where the village had gone. *Krianne yui-Masthaba had unhappened it.* Not for who they were, not for anything they had done or would do, but merely to eliminate some distant, unknown enemy of Raphel's, their children's children's children. A war-crime of the highest order — a crime of time itself.

Mae felt rage boil up inside her, rage she had not felt since the days of the Cosmic War.

* * *

Lotto stood back, helpless, as she saw the last wispy remnants of the village fade away.

She felt the Time Winds washing over her, and then the Archon found themself back in the present, where — of course — no evidence of the village was to be found. Just her house, perched precariously in its tree, off in the distance.

Lotto sat down, and began to weep — both for the village, and for Mae. Mae was not there, and Lotto did not know why.

* * *

Krianne yui-Masthaba, War Lord of Raphel, realised too late that she had made a mistake — that she had made a very grievous and very common mistake.

She had looked upon the lovable, slightly uncanny rabbit, and assumed that this was all Mae was.

* * *

Mae jumped out toward War Lord Krianne, and as she leapt through the air, Krianne looked at her and saw her — really *saw* her — for the first time. In an instant, her body morphed through a thousand shells — an Archon warform, a Jubjub bird, a serpentine writhe… — as until the the strains of the New Vampires, which she had hidden within the deepest recesses of her biodata, erupted, and she bared her fangs, sinking them deep into the woman.

A terrible venom, the blood of an ur-vessel of the Cathedral, spread throughout the veins of the Ishioka, and her biodata flipped around itself, reshaped against its will, made to writhe in the helpless agony of transformation. But there would be no rebirth, no light at the end of this journey — just a corpse. The War Lord was not human, she was not even remotely xertonoid. She had been born in the Lesser Black Void, which was still so Great. But even a biology hardened against the harsh vacuum of space, even a body re-engineered with devotional zeal, found itself giving out as the ancient poison ate away at her very past. Her world collapsed, every

possible action she had taken unwinding itself, slithering back into the great ruin that she was now.

Mae stepped back in disgust, realising the horror of what she had just done. She had taken away another being's autonomy within existence, twisted it through itself and *mutilated* it.

The kind of thing an Archon Warrior might do, but *greater* Elementals were meant to be above that sort of thing. Her mind raced back to the War Against History, and she remembered this was not the first time. There she was, in the Seventh Battle of Lilitu's Devouring[5], where she had ripped entire planets from their lattices to ward off Lilitu herself, and drive her towards the Pearly Gates.

She had promised herself, when she'd escaped all that terror with her lovely Detective, that she'd never commit such atrocities again. Golly, she'd even *forgotten* she'd done them, partially — probably some kind of self-defence against the trauma — and here she was.

She'd done it again.

She'd used her position, as a Time Elemental keyed into the subtleties of the chronal way, to…

Well, it was nothing the War Lord hadn't inflicted upon the villagers and their descendance. Perhaps it was deserved. But that didn't seem to make it better. That sort of reasoning was how time wars started.

---

[5] Lilitu's identity remains a point of considerable debate. There is persuasive evidence that one of the most infamous epithets in popular chronicles of the War referred to this same being. However, given the obvious linguistic reasons to suspect that Lilitu was the eldest daughter of Lilith, the infamous Vampire Queen of the Morning Star and first known xertonoid offspring of the Greater Time Elementals, it is difficult to reconcile this claim with the persistent rumour that the epithet in question referred to a particularly degenerate scion of the imperial bloodline of Hyades-Space. Given the Archons' vested interest, throughout the later stages of the Cosmic War, in asserting the Tyrants of H-Space as their truest foes, and in downplaying the intestine struggles which the Vampire Queen embodied, it seems plausible that the rumours may have originated on the Morning Star itself, although the Tyrants themselves would also have had sound motives to try and claim Lilitu's many victorious campaigns for themselves; whether or not they were ever truly related, she certainly possessed a militaristic ferocity, a sheer *savagery* which would have appealed to the Tyrants' baser instincts.

Mae turned her back on the abomination she'd created, and drifted back through the Tourbillon, back to Ashio Trias and to her lovely Detective.

* * *

Through her weeping, Lotto slept.

* * *

Mae rode the wavefronts of the new history; she dropped down from the Tourbillon and onto Ashio Trias. The village followed her.

It hadn't been a clean surgery. No precise timeline-incisionist was Mae; more of a barber-surgeon of chronology. She'd do the job — had done — but there would be blood; there would be scars.

And so, the town had returned, but not quite as it had been.

The people were often… confused. Not sure who their parents were — aware of their own children's lives before they'd happened. Occasionally someone would be adamant that they *didn't*, in fact, exist.

And the scars crept backwards along the timeline of the barber-surgeon, rippling…

* * *

Lotto awoke to find the village all around her. She began to walk toward the nearest house, briefly thinking she was back in the half-real landscape, until someone bumped straight into her.

A small, fuzzy rabbit.

She burst into tears. Tears of joy.

* * *

Mae found Lotto wandering the town, half-dazed, and picked her up, returning to the pair's house. During the travel through the Tourbillon, Lotto fell asleep and upon their return to the home, Mae left them draped across their bed.

Ready for whatever tomorrow had in store.

* * *

And on a ship at the edge of space, a creature stirred, flexing its tendrils through the time distortions the thing had left behind, becoming more and more of a presence throughout the structure of history. Throughout History…

And the blood of the Vampire-Queen of the Morning Star burnt through her veins…